

Subject: Visitor Center Initiative (VCI) Committee Kick-off Meeting, 16-17 May 2001

1. Attendees:

Darrell Lewis* (CECW-ON)
George Tabb* (CECW-ON)
Steve Austin* (CECW-ON)
Joe Bertolini (LRL)
Greg Miller (NWK)
Jim Pennaz (POH)
Nancy Rogers (SPD)
Matt Seavey (SWF)
Debra Stokes (MVN)
Mark Wade (SAS)
Bruce Thornton (SAM)

*Part time attendees (Steering Committee)

2. The VCI Committee meeting convened in HQ on 16 March at 0800 hrs. and adjourned on 17 March at 1500 hrs. Steve opened the meeting by welcoming each participant and briefly described the selection process used for the committee members. He also acknowledged that each member was there because of their self-motivation, job dedication and expertise in the interpretive and visitor center fields. He then asked each attendee to provide a short description of their involvement and past experience in the visitor center program.

3. Darrell provided the program overview and explained the challenges before the committee. His key points were as follows:

- A.** Justification and support for visitor program funds are essential.
- B.** The Corps' story must be presented in a passionate and appealing manner.
- C.** Static information is ineffective.
- D.** Visitor Centers are Corps assets and not solely for the use of any particular organization or program.
- E.** Answer questions about:
 - a.** What is the worth of the program to the agency?
 - b.** Why should recommendations be implemented?
 - c.** How does it support the Strategic Plan?

d. Why is the Visitor Center Program important?

- F.** Visitor Center facilities must address Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.
- G.** Make sure input is solicited from other interpretive organization and considered in the VCI evaluation process.
- H.** Evaluate current Visitor Center guidance and provide revision recommendations.
- I.** Mesh VCI efforts with Interpretive Services and Outreach Program (ISOP).

4. Following the opening remarks and program overview the Committee convened to develop an implementation plan, schedule and budget. It is anticipated the overall VCI effort will require approximately 18-months to complete. The initial formulation steps, anticipated action dates and associated costs are shown on Attachment 1.

5. The next order of discussion was to determine the best way to evaluate the 8 Type A regional centers, 53 Type B project centers, and 242 Type C centers. A survey of visitor center managers was decided as the first order of importance. It was decided that an email survey would be the most efficient method to reach each manager. All Type A, all Type B and two (2) Type C centers from each district would comprise the survey field, approximately 130 centers. In addition, sample questions were developed and the need for contractor support identified. The anticipated role of the contractor is: add another dimension to the team's content knowledge and finalize the in-house survey questionnaire, distribute and analyze its results and develop an evaluation sheet for the VCI Team to use during their on-site visitor center inspections. Nancy Rogers and Matt Seavey have the lead on this initiative.

6. The VCI guidance indicated a "Command Brief" was needed. Discussion revolved around its potential audiences, content, methods of presentation, applications and potential locations. Contract support was identified as the method in which this initiative could be evaluated. There was group consensus that a widespread need exists to tell the "Corps Story" in all Corps visitor centers, particularly in the Type A & B centers. The group also identified the need to develop an exhibit design for the "Corps Story" that can be integrated into existing visitor centers without appearing to be an add on exhibit. The design would help field personnel add a Corps exhibit without "re-inventing the wheel" at each location. Several goals and objectives emerged from the discussion to guide the development of a design concept to be contracted this FY. Greg Miller and Joe Bertolini have the lead on this initiative. The goals and objectives are:

- A.** The purpose of the exhibit would be to provide an interesting and passionate presentation that includes both Corps historical and modern mission sub themes. It would correct erroneous opinions and help to build the Corps constituency.

B. Use interactive audiovisual/interactive media to communicate the detailed messages, allowing the visitor to choose those messages of interest to them.

C. Structure audio visual and structural design so that it can be easily adapted to both simple low cost exhibits for Type B & C centers and a more sophisticated version for Type A centers.

The following actions were identified to guide production of the Corps Story exhibit:

A. Coordinate with HQ Public Affairs, History and ISOP interests.

B. Contract for audiovisual/interactive design concept that defines content, video production, hardware and software development (possibly CD-ROM).

C. Contract for an exhibit design concept that would create an attractive structure/back drop for the audiovisual presentation.

D. Integrate these products into a decision brief that can be used to pitch the product.

E. Secure funding for final design, fabrication and installation at selected Type A centers.

7. Feedback is critical for the success of the program. The Committee evaluated ways in which we could receive maximum results in a timely and economical manner. The National Association of Interpretation (NAI) Conference being held 6 – 10 November 01 in Des Moines, IA was identified as a prime opportunity to interface with resource managers attending the conference. A VCI Focus Group Meeting is proposed prior to this conference in which four VCI Team members will conduct to solicit information. HQ will send letters requesting all Type A facility managers attend this meeting. Joe will prepare a draft letter for HQ to distribute.

8. One function of the initiative is to develop a team of Corps employees who can act as “consultants” for renovation of on-the-ground visitor centers for the use of districts that lack or have limited expertise in this area. Debra informed the group about the development of the Natural Resources Management (NRM) Gateway, a one-stop depository of information and institutional knowledge of the natural resources management and recreation programs to be used by the Corps community. One of the Gateway’s focus topics is visitor centers. As a part of the consultant function, she made the suggestion to create a “virtual” visitor center, a place to go when considering the who, what, why, where, when and what of operating a visitor center. This information can also include sections on clauses to consider when writing request for proposals, lessons learned, tools and tips, etc. This effort will tie in nicely with the Interpretive Services and Outreach focus topic that will concentrate on information concerning what to consider when making the decision to create, update, rehabilitate or replace exhibits, interpretative panels, brochures, etc. A Gateway workshop is scheduled for 16-20 July 01 in

Louisville, KY. During this workshop a VCI team member will assist with the placement of information concerning visitor centers on the Gateway. Debra Stokes and Mark Wade have the lead on this initiative.

9. The meeting adjourned at 1500 hrs on 17 May. The following “Taskers” were assigned.

| Lead Team Member(s) | Tasker | Anticipated completion date |
|------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| Nancy Rogers Matt Seavey | Prepare draft list of VCI survey questions, scope of work and cost estimate for VCI survey | 15 June |
| Jim Pennaz | Prepare draft VCI schedule and cost estimate | 25 May |
| Greg Miller Joe Bertolini | Develop draft scope of work cost estimate and schedule for preparation Corps Story. | |
| Joe Bertolini | Coordinate development of Corps Focus Meeting to be held in conjunction with November NAI Conference in Des Moines, IA. | |
| Debra Stokes Mark Wade | Identify and collect resource material for inclusion on the VCI Gateway site and develop site design concept. | 6 July 01 |
| All | Identify two Type C facilities in each district to receive survey questionnaire. | 29 June 01 |

Copy Furnished:
VCI MFT
Steve Austin (CECW-ON)
Brad Keshlear (SAD-CM-OC)
John Anderson (CESAM-OP-T)
Roger Burke (CESAM-PD-F)
Curtis Flakes (CESAM-PD)

R. Bruce Thornton
VCI Manager

Attachment 1
VISITORS CENTER INITIATIVE
PROGRAMMED
COST/SCHEDULE/ACTIVITY
17 May 2001

| COST | SCHEDULE | ACTIVITY |
|--|--------------------------|--|
| Estimated FY01 Costs | | |
| \$15K | May 01 | *Initial Visitor Center Initiative Meeting. Develop questionnaire for all "A", "B", and selected "C" centers (100-140 sample size). Plan how to accomplish mission. |
| \$15K | Jun 01 | Contractor to complete visitor center questionnaire and evaluation form/checklist for visitor centers. Team to use form to evaluate selected centers. Send out questionnaire to centers. |
| \$25K | Jul 01 | Review responses to questionnaire by e-mail. Responses to be consolidated by contractor and forwarded to team members. Team member to prepare concept plan for "Corps Story". |
| \$40K | Aug 01 thru Sep 01 | *Meet (location to be determined) to discuss results of questionnaire and look at selected visitor centers (\$30K). Two contractors to attend (\$10K). Team members to provide draft recommendations on visitor center improvements. Discuss "Corps Story" concept and send out request for proposals for "Corps Story". |
| \$95K - \$100K Estimated FY01 Total Costs | | |

Attachment 1
VISITORS CENTER INITIATIVE
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| Estimated FY02 Costs | | |
|---|----------------------|--|
| \$10K | Nov 6-10 | National Association of Interpretation Conference in Des Moines. Four team members to attend and make presentation on Visitor Center Initiative. Will invite Type A visitor center managers to attend. Will hold listening session for all Corps personnel attending to obtain additional input on Visitor Center Initiative. |
| \$15K | Dec | *Meeting to discuss survey results, listening session, and site visits. Continue work on visitor center recommendations. Review requests for proposals for "Corps Story". Select contractor. Initiate development of virtual visitor center to include info on what types of exhibits work, requests for proposals and lessons learned. Virtual visitor center to take place of or supplement "consultants". |
| \$15K | 2 nd qtr. | *Review "Corps Story" draft. Review Web Site development. Initiate review of ER's, EP's that pertain to visitor centers. |
| \$30K | Through FY02 Finish | *Complete "Corps Story", web site development; recommend revisions to ER's, & EP's. Provide specific recommendations for improvements to the visitor center program. Complete all tasks outlined in charter. |
| \$70K Estimated FY02 Total Costs | | |
| \$170K Estimated FY01 & FY02 Total Costs | | |
| \$80K Contingency of the total \$250K Available Budget | | |